

Representative Wells (or Chairman Wells), members of the Committee, for the record my name is Don Allen of Billings, Montana and I am the Chairperson of the Montana State Library Commission.

Please support the Montana State Library's budget request that is before you today.

You just heard from Darlene Staffeldt, State Librarian, about the wide-ranging services that the Montana State Library provides. After listening to Darlene's presentation, I hope that it is clear that the State Library reaches out to every Montanan.

Our digital library program reaches out to the natural resource community with the vast quantities of information they work hard to make accessible to everyone from Montana businesses to hunters and hikers.

Our Talking Book Library reaches out to Montana's visually impaired citizens – people who, without our services, would not have access to books or magazines or movies.

Our Library Development Department reaches all Montana citizens by providing consulting and training and educational opportunities to librarians across the state.

And through the statewide purchases we negotiate, we reach any Montanan who needs up-to-the-minute information through the statewide databases that provide

free, high-quality information from journals and newspapers around the world.

And, our staff of highly-qualified librarians reaches out to the nearly 13,000 state government employees who rely on the State Library for the information they need to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively. Again, this eventually helps all Montanans.

It seems like this phenomenal reach – to every Montana citizen -- would be enough, but the State Library is constantly reinventing itself, trying to do more with less, and finding better ways to serve the citizens of Montana – whatever their information needs may be.

To that end, at our August 2006 Commission meeting, we passed a new long range plan for the State Library. This long range plan includes five significant long term goals and numerous strategic initiatives or objectives.

The basis of this plan is working in new and innovative ways to provide free access to high-quality, up-to-the-minute accurate information. Through our various programs and departments, the State Library ensures that all Montanans have access to the information they need to make informed decisions – whether they need the information for a school report or to start their own business or to find out more about a medical diagnosis or to finish a report on Montana's natural resources.

Access to information is the foundation of good government and of government accountability. Access to information is the foundation of an informed citizenry, of a strong business community, of a progressive educational foundation. Without the Montana State Library and its many services to our citizens, businesses, and government employees, the state of Montana would be lacking in information resources.

Recent comments from patrons have indicated how much they value the wide-ranging services of the Montana State Library. One local business owner claimed that NRIS is critical to the efficient and effective use of natural resource data and information in Montana and that without the services NRIS provides, the cost of natural resource management and environmental management services in Montana would increase and the quality would go down.

The President of the Mineral County Library Board, Dan Aranson, recently wrote that the State Library staff are the quintessential public servants – well-informed, professional, candid, down to earth folks who leave him feeling inspired to do his job.

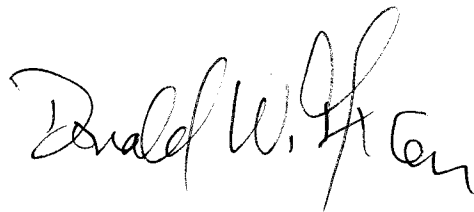
Larry Sickerson of the Montana Department of Transportation recently said that the resources of the Montana Natural Heritage Program are absolutely invaluable to MDT as they plan and design work in the most timely and economical manner possible, thus saving the Montana taxpayer time and money. Mr. Sickerson also commented that every MDT project on which he has

worked for over ten years has utilized information available in the Natural Heritage database, helping MDT to complete jobs on time and on budget.

These few comments are only illustrations of what we at the State Library know is true. Over and over again, we hear that the services of the Montana State Library save people, businesses, organizations, and taxpayers time and money. That without the State Library staff, people, from business owners to state government employees, would simply not know where to turn for answers to questions that affect everything from school projects to multi-million dollar highway projects. That the information we work hard to make accessible to the public, to government employees, to business owners and even to school children is invaluable and only available because of the work we do.

Your support of the State Library's budget, including all of the decision packages, will only help the State Library to continue to do great things for all of Montana's citizens.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Donald W. Hagen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "D" and "H".